

## **Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin**

**Name:** Prime Products

**School & Grade:** Sixth - Eight Graders at DeLong Middle School, Eau Claire

**Business Name:** Prime Products

**What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.**

Prime Products began in 2000 with a \$50 grant from our PTO and just a handful of art students who wanted to learn about art and business. Students designed ceramic pieces that were unique. They created a product line for wildlife: ceramic bird houses, baths and feeders. Our students became truly inspired with their own success. Their very first sale brought in over \$1,700 in sales. Students worked after school and weekends to keep up with production. Their art teacher also volunteered time to keep the art room open. After their first year in business they were able to take a \$50 grant and turn it into almost \$4,000. At the end of the school year student worked on a budget to purchase more materials for the following school year and the rest of the money was donated back to the community. Our area humane association and a children's museum were the recipients.

**Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.**

The essential components of Prime Products include a similar business structure to other successful small businesses.

- 1) Students create prototypes of products that members consider to include in a product line. (Products include ceramic bird houses, bird feeders, bird baths, photo holders, note cards, jewelry, trays, toad huts, a variety of vases to name a few). Prices of the products range from \$1 to \$35 to allow for more opportunities for customer sales. These products need to have a Universal Design to allow for any student with any ability the opportunity to create. Student designers must consider that any student at DeLong should be able to be included within the assembly line to produce this product.
- 2) Upon adoption of an item into the product line, students produce an inventory and assign price points. Several students will test the market to see if this product will sell at the price assigned. Students will only adopt products that are unique and fit the brand of Prime Products.
- 3) Students choose their work assignment. Some students will choose a management position and will use leadership skills to teach other students necessary skills to be successful.
- 4) Accounting procedures are set into place to monitor inventory and sales. Deposits from sales are made in a special account. Deposits and expenditures are kept track of by students with the help of their advisor. Students will order supplies for consumable materials such as clay and glazes to make more products.
- 5) Students create marketing plans and set up booths for sale of items at community and school events. Students will communicate concepts and answer questions about their products and company.
- 6) At the end of the school year, students vote on the recipient for the remaining profits and present a check to that local charity/non-profit. Over the 14 years Prime Products has given back over \$12,000.

## **Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.**

Prime Products brings students with diverse abilities and ages together to learn how artists create and sell their work. Prime Products has a core group of 20 students and reaches out to include at least 200 of 900 students at Delong Middle School. Students have learned that production work within a business is important. In order to make money they needed product. Students decided to use an assembly line. They designed it and in 50 minutes 18 students were able to make over 30 clay birdhouses. Their goal was 20. After working on that assembly line one of our former 7<sup>th</sup> graders, Brent explained, "I understand the efficiency of an assembly line, but it's not much fun. I don't want to do this for a job when I get out of school."

One obstacle that many Prime Product students encounter as a manager is about how to lead. One of our 6<sup>th</sup> graders, Sarah asked, "How do you get these kids to listen to you? And, how do you get them to do work if they are not interested?" All students learn about leadership skills through managing product lines.

Prime Products is a business that is an equal opportunity employer. Any student from Delong may work within the company structure. There are leadership opportunities for students interested in taking more responsibility, but another focus for this company is collaboration within our school and community. Students have already formed a working relationship with University entrepreneur students, art education and special education students. Our students need to use numerous academic and art skills to design, manufacture, market, and sell their work.

Students set goals for their company. If they are not meeting their goals they will problem solve to either meet the goal or redesign it. Students are able to witness the relevance of the arts through their creative work and sales. Students document community feedback, personal learning, collaborative learning, and creative problem solving.

### **Awards and Grants**

- **2000 PTO Grant** for \$50 to begin Prime Products
- **2004 CABCO AWARD** for contributions Delong Students have made to our community from Community Asset Building Council and the Eau Claire Leader Telegram
- **2009 Arts@ Large** grant awarded for \$5500 that allowed Prime Products to be taught within the regular school day as a class.
- **2010 Wisconsin Retired Education Association** awarded a \$2000 grant to Prime Products

<https://www.wrea.net/foundation/challengeawards.asp>

- **2011 Eau Claire Art League** presented Prime Products with a \$50 grant after students presented art & business ideas as a workshop
- **2013 Youth Philanthropist of the Year** nominated by Sacred Heart Hospital for our new program, Prime Products goes Pink for Families.

<http://www.wgow.com/storv/23975397/2013/11/14/students-local-couple-stand-out-during-celebration-of-philanthropy>

- [http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front\\_page/article\\_cce14d20-4c26-11e3-a374-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_cce14d20-4c26-11e3-a374-0019bb2963f4.html)

**What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?**

We continue to expand our small business to allow more students opportunities to participate, help students understand and design products that can be created by all students using Universal Design in production. The overall goal of our program is to allow all students with diverse abilities opportunities to successfully work within a student run business and to create a sustainable mentor program. This program connects middle school students with higher education students (Art Education, Special Education, School of Business), area businesses, and reconnects with the elementary schools that feed Delong. Students gain knowledge in Universal Design and apply this knowledge to make Prime Products even more accessible to all students. Our last grant allowed us to purchase a clay extruder that has a Universal Design and will allow more participation in our production work.

Students within Prime Products will continue to grow their business by increasing their product line. Just this past week they have designed 2 new products with a unique design. One product is a soap dish and the other is a floral frog designed for a mason jar. Prime Products would like to grow their product line to include sand etched products. Sand etching equipment is costly so students are looking at awards and grants to raise funds.

Prime Products has included some elementary schools siblings but OMS students would like to reach more. We need to find common time for this to happen.

The Prime Products' model has developed into a solid program that Delong students wish to grow within their own school, community, and share with other schools. We have already shared at the state level with art educators. We will continue to share our learning